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A PARSHA THOUGHT

Habits



RABBI YEHUDAH LEVI

Disclaimer: Whenever discussing the biblical personalities it is imperative to be highly sensitive to the realization that we have limited comprehension of the lives these people led. Certainly, in regards to our holy ancestors and other righteous individuals whose great stature are beyond our grasp, extreme deference and caution is in order. All our perspectives must be filtered through the prism of *Chazal* (the Sages) and we can never pass judgment based on our limited understanding.

But with due sensitivity, Lot is difficult to understand. He displayed heroism in Sedom for inviting and subsequently protecting his guests at his own personal peril, but at the same time he jeopardized his two daughters' security by offering them to the angry mob gathered around his house. Additionally, the Midrash says that upon leaving Avraham, Lot departed from G-d as well, and was attracted to Sedom because of the debauched lifestyle of her inhabitants. Our tradition tells us that at that stage of his life Lot was on the path of wickedness and not righteousness. How could it be that a person removed from G-d was so selflessly dedicated to the *mitzvah* of *hachnasas orchim* (welcoming guests)?



Rashi says that Lot learnt the importance of *hachnasas orchim* from Avraham, and Maharal explains that he was so accustomed to this *mitzvah* that it became almost a part of him.

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THE RABBI WAS ASKED *ON THE PARASHA*

THIS WEEK WITH
RABBI DAVID SPETNER

Q: At the close of the story of *Yishmael* in this week's *sidra* we are told he became "*roveh kahshus.*" I have seen, even in Artscroll works, different translations of this phrase. One writes "an accomplished archer" and another writes "a shooter, an archer." How do we understand it?

A: The *meforshim* here struggle with an apparent redundancy in this phrase. The first word, "*roveh,*" means a shooter. Had the second word been pronounced "*keshes*" it would be translated "bow" and the phrase would mean "a shooter of a bow." However, it is pronounced "*kahshus,*" which means a person who shoots with a bow. This seems to be no different than the first word "*roveh.*"

The different translations you have seen represent different answers to this question.

Rashi is understood by the commentaries on Rashi as explaining that "*roveh*" means "a shooter with a bow," while "*kahshus*" indicates expertise in shooting with a bow. Thus the phrase together refers to an

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THE RABBI WAS ASKED *ON THE PARASHA*

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expert bowman. Ramban, however, understands "*roveh*" as a general term for shooting things that might include rocks with a slingshot or some other method. Hence, the second word is needed to clarify which type of shooter he was, i.e., a bowman.

There actually is another suggestion for which I have not seen a published translation. Radak writes that "*kahshus*" does not refer to a bowman at all, but a manufacturer of bows!

Something always bugged you about the upcoming parasha (or last week's)? Ask! Submit a question on the parasha by Monday at noon by emailing parasha@cincykollel.org. Questions will be selected to address at the discretion of the Rabbi who is answering that week. Questions may be edited for brevity/clarity.

A PARASHA THOUGHT CONTINUED

Even when other areas of his life became corrupted, Lot followed the path he was habituated to in the house of Avraham, for habituation, says the Maharal, is more powerful than anything else.

The effects developing and maintaining good habits can have on our *avodas Hashem* should not be underestimated. Whether in direct service to Hashem such as seriousness in prayer and commitment to study, or in interpersonal relationships such as smiling at others and devoted acts of kindness, any positive trait we accustom ourselves to doing will impact our lives immeasurably. This is true, in part, because when something becomes second nature, the struggle to practice it becomes less. Of course, mechanical actions and *mitzvos* done by rote are never the goal, but a deed repeatedly performed makes an imprint on the heart; as the *Sefer Hachinuch* famously guides, "after the actions the heart is drawn." Taking action, making changes, and being intentional in the activities we pursue are the building blocks towards a Torah lifestyle, and after setting down the foundation of proper behavior we can eventually fill our lives with added dimensions of meaning, understanding, and purpose. We must set our course, and then, the Talmud teaches, Heaven will assist us on our path.

TRIVIA

RABBI GAVI KADISH

There are two unique *brachos* that the Gemara says should be recited based upon an incident in this week's *parasha*. What are they? And, can we still recite these *brachos* nowadays?

Hashem sends two angels to Sedom, one to destroy Sedom, and the angel Rafael to save Lot. Famously, as the angels are saving Lot and his wife from Sedom the angels command them "not to look behind" at the destruction of Sedom. Lot's wife peers behind her and turns into a pillar of salt. The Gemara in *Brachos* (54b) comments that "on Lot and his wife one recites two *brachos*, on his wife one recites the *bracha* of '*baruch Dayan Haemes*' or blessed is the just Judge, and on Lot one recites '*baruch Zocher Hatzadikim*' or blessed is the One who remembers the righteous." The *Shulchan Aruch* codifies this *halacha* (218:8) and says that when one merely sees Lot's wife they recite both of these *brachos*. The *Mishna Berura* explains that these two *brachos* are recited even without seeing the burial place of Lot (in fact the *bracha* on Lot would not be recited for merely seeing his burial place, *Mishna Berura* 218:24), because when one sees the pillar of salt one is reminded of the miracle that transpired with Lot. He was saved in the merit of Avraham, hence the verbiage of the *bracha* "blessed is the One who remembers the righteous" even at a time when "*din*" or judgment was being exacted. Does this *bracha* still exist? The Gemara in *Nida* (as well as the Gemara in *Brachos*) seems to indicate that the pillar existed since Alexander asks the *chachamim* if the pillar would confer impurity like any other carcass. The *Bechor Shor* (19:26), one of the *Balei Hatosfos*, quotes those who say it could still be seen in his day. Some have theorized that it is located on the eastern slopes of Mount Sodom, overlooking Highway 90 at the southern end of the Dead Sea basin. However, I saw quoted, that when Rav Chaim Kanievsky was shown a picture of the alleged pillar of salt, he asked based upon a *Pirkei D'Rebi Eleizer* if there are oxen that roam around its feet. When the response was no, he concluded that this could not be the pillar of salt since oxen should be found there. The *Piskei Teshuvos* (218, footnote 31), comments with regards to the pillar of salt and other similar *brachos*, that since we do not have a clear tradition on the matter, this *bracha* should not be recited even without Hashem's name.